

THE SPIRITUAL ISSUES OF THE WAR

This bulletin is published for readers at home and abroad by the Religions Division of the Ministry of Information, London, to elucidate the spiritual issues at stake in the war, and to provide information concerning the British Churches in wartime, as well as their contribution to post-war reconstruction.

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ARMY MOTOR CHURCHES AT WORK

In *Spiritual Issues* No. 248 we described the dedication by the late Archbishop of Canterbury of the Mobile Churches of St. Paul and St. George. Both these Churches have now crossed to the Continent. We are able to give eye-witness accounts of these Churches at work. One story comes from a military observer, the other from a Chaplain who had charge of the Mobile Church of St. Paul for a short time.

"St. George Meets the Dragon"

A military correspondent writes: "I had only been out in France a few days, when there appeared in orders the notice that there would be a Church Service at 1100 hours on the next day, which was Sunday.

"Being mindful of a safe crossing of the Channel I thought I would like to go, and noted that the Service was to take place just the other side of a little wood which skirted the field where we had our foxholes.

"To tell you the honest truth, next morning I forgot all about the Service until about 1045 hours, when I heard a beautiful peal of Church bells being run, apparently from the local village. The sound came from the other side of the wood and I was reminded of my intention.

"I just had time to wash my hands and slip on my jacket, and to get mobile, as we now say. As I ran across, I was wishing that I was going to the Church with the bells.

"I made my way through the copse, and just where the trees parted I saw to my astonishment a flag-pole with the flag of St. George fluttering at its top.

"Just then the bells stopped, and the sound of an organ voluntary greeted my ears—it was a Bach prelude. As I burst from the wood, a little breathlessly, a strange sight met my eyes.

"The Church even had become mobile.

"There in front of me was a three-ton lorry which had been converted into a Caravan Church. On the side was inscribed in large letters—"The Church of St. George,"—on top was a large cross.

"The mystery of the Church bells then became apparent. The outfit was furnished with a loud hailer, and the driver of the vehicle—who also acted as Sexton and Verger—was busy putting away a gramophone record of some famous chimes.

"There in front of a 'mike' was a gramophone, and the organ voluntary which I had heard was coming to its sweet close—its melodious notes had charmed a congregation of a hundred or so fellows into receptive silence, awaiting the Padre's message.

"They were gathered round the end of the caravan, which had large double doors at the back flung wide open; an altar delightfully furnished in satin and velvet in the British Army colours of red and blue, reminded me of the old Jews, who wherever they went set up an altar to the Lord. This one, however, was surmounted by a beautifully carved Cross supported by a pair of handsome candlesticks.

"When the Padre in his clerical robes gave out the number of the first hymn, I wondered, only for a moment, whether we

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should be singing unaccompanied. By the side of the caravan, and attached to it, was what is known as a Penthouse—a canvas marquee, easily erected. From it came the strains of a harmonium playing the first line of the hymn and away we went.

"It was a simple service, under the arches of heaven, with just those things which one associates with one's own Parish Church—the bells, the organ, the altar—the flag of St. George fluttering from the Church tower. I was homesick.

"After Morning Prayer, the Padre invited those who wished to stay behind for a Celebration of the Holy Communion. Whilst we chatted for a moment or two the 'Sexton' moved the altar to the cab end of the caravan and there, with a dozen stools, was a perfect little chapel.

"Ten of us stayed to Communion. With the doors closed, the local noise was almost inaudible, and with plenty of light through the four windows, we had a tiny haven of peace.

"After the Service I asked the Padre if I could have a talk with him. 'Sure,' he said, 'But it'll have to be to-morrow, old boy, as we are going to upsticks to go to a short Service I have to take before dinner at an A.A. gun-site a mile or so up the road.'"

The correspondent states that the motor church has been all over the battle area and though normally it cannot be taken too near the front line owing to its size, it has been under shell fire.

A Chaplain's Report on the Mobile Church of St. Paul

A senior Chaplain gives the following account of his actual use of the other Mobile Church, that of St. Paul.

"One day, about the time of our great British thrust from Caumont to Vire, I happened to be fortunate enough to see a copy of *The Times* of the previous day. Scanning first the ecclesiastical column for news of friends, I was surprised and delighted to read that two Mobile Churches had been accepted that day by the Archbishop of Canterbury. They were to be used in Normandy for work among units who had no Chaplain of their very own, and who depended for Services on visits from a Chaplain who might have many other units under his care. Thought I, just the very thing I need. Thought I, secondly, and probably just the very thing I shall never get. But nearly

five years as an Army Chaplain had taught me how to get what I wanted. At the first opportunity, therefore, I dropped the penny in the right slot and waited in hope. Indeed I had a case. My own work is to organize the Chaplaincy Services for those innumerable units that support the fighting divisions of a Corps in battle. It means about 10,000 men, and always too few Chaplains to do it. It means units in a hundred places, from large units of four figures to tiny units of twelve, and none of them ever in the same place for seven days together. Added to that, casualties in the fighting divisions had sadly depleted my band of Chaplains. They had been taken to fill the places of those killed and wounded. Four Chaplains cannot do the work of nine, but the Mobile Church could go far to help. Would that penny drop?

"It did, and quickly. Not long after, while the battle of the Falaise Gap was nearing its terrible end, a teleprint message came from the A.C.G., Second Army. I was to return to Army H.Q. next day 'to pick up the Motor Church of St. Paul' and use it for a week. That was ten days ago, and I still have it!

"Its first journey from Army to Corps was not unworthy of its Patron Saint. From the beach-head, our course lay through the heart of all the country of the Bocages, through places whose names will live in history: Tilly, Villers Bocages, The Odon, Aunay-sur-Odon, the very summit of Mount Pincon, The Orne, Conde-sur-Norreau, Flers. The towns lie shattered beyond imagination, 'the sufferings of this present time.' Everywhere as we passed, British faces looked up at us and grinned as they paused in their endless and vital work on the roads. Military policemen at cross roads waved us on, their tanned and dusty faces beaming upon this unexpected sight.

"The Church bears the lettering 'The Motor Church of St. Paul' set around a striking St. Paul in vivid colours holding the sword of the Spirit in one hand and the glorious Gospel in the other.

"French refugees returning 'home' in hundreds, in every imaginable vehicle, hesitated as we passed, shouting, and greeting us with waving hands and happy faces, and then, catching sight of 'St. Paul,' stopping in their greeting to gaze for a moment upon this big church on wheels before it passed out of sight.

"It is indeed a novelty and therein lies some of its attraction. It has come from

you, the Church at home, to us, the Church out here. It is a visible link with home and the Parish Church at home. Inside is a beautiful little altar decked in gold and red with a cross of unique design, and candlesticks. There is room for a dozen worshippers. Inside, it is well lit and can be blacked out—a vital thing. The loud-speaker equipment enables one to speak easily to a congregation of 5,000. It has its own wireless set.

“Our first Service was not at all what we had planned. It was on the Eve of St. Bartholomew’s Day. A few minutes before we started, it began to pour with rain, and our audience wisely stayed in their tents. And there in tents, dry and comfortable, they heard every word. We preached to ‘an unseen congregation,’ some of them several hundred yards away.

“Next day it went on tour. There were quiet Communion Services in the early dawn: there were Services in apple orchards where men sat on the green grass in companies: Services in open fields under the sun: Services in the forests. One in particular was memorable. For a number of the worshippers it was their first service in France since “D” Day. There were over 40 communicants out of a congregation at the preceding Mattins of 70. Men straight from the battle have already gathered at its altar to receive The Christ and to hear again the glorious Gospel. Tiny units, whose services are to provide much needed hot showers and clean clothing for thousands of their comrades, have held their services at its doors and under its roof. Men who deal with the salvage of the battlefield have knelt in gratitude beside the Mobile Church. And we can foresee other uses—Padre’s Hours in comfort and quiet, little confirmation classes, a quiet room for reading and writing.”

Two More Mobile Churches

The Bishop of Durham and the Bishop of Newcastle have both recently dedicated two mobile churches and all four of these will shortly be used for the British Forces overseas.

“SILENCE IMPOSSIBLE” — Dr. Marc Boegner on the Christian and Civil Order

Dr. Boegner, leader of the French Protestants, writes in *Le Figaro*:

Silence is impossible, because it is urgently necessary, in present circumstances, to return to the necessary distinction common

to all Christian theologies between the calling of the State and that of the Church, and to indicate the practical results of that distinction. There is no question of politics here—only a religious view of the problem.

For Christian theology, in fact, the State, like the Church, has a religious vocation in the sense that, like the Church, it receives its calling from God, even if it be of another order. Its first task is to prevent the people from slipping down into total anarchy under the influence of human frailty, and to bring about the rule of justice so that all can lead, as St. Paul would say, “a quiet and peaceable life.” The authorities who wield public power, bear the sword, “being servants of God to exercise vengeance and to punish him that doth wrong.” This task of the State corresponds to a profound aspiration, whether conscious or not, in the mass of the people. The Churches, whose vocation is to announce the will of God, not only to individuals but to nations and states, have the duty to recall to the State—if it is tempted to forget it—that its primary function is to exercise justice.

They certainly have a very extensive obligation in this delicate matter. They have to say, and to say over and over again, to those whom St. Paul calls magistrates, that the exercise of justice demands the fulfilment of certain conditions if it is to attain its end.

The first condition is undoubtedly that within its boundaries a State must alone wield the power of arresting citizens and of condemning or acquitting them. General de Gaulle has spoken strong words on this subject, words which have produced a lasting echo in Christian consciences. One can only hope that those who have to translate these noble affirmations into sovereign action will have the authority, the energy and the courage necessary for success.

The second condition, and I think I do not deceive myself in thinking that all Frenchmen are in agreement on this point, is that justice must not be delayed indefinitely but must be prompt and efficacious. This does not mean that it must be rash, it means that it is not admissible from the point of view of a Christian doctrine of the State that men by the thousand should be submitted to an administrative imprisonment, which does not allow them to foresee how long it will last without being able to prepare their defence in cases where they will one day be the object of a charge about which they are completely ignorant.

I touch here on the most sacred rights of human personality, with which is bound up all the justice which our human condition allows. A State which does not ensure respect for human personality, either because it does not wish to, or because it has not the power to do so, is fatally exposed to committing the worst injustices at the very moment when it is trying to exercise justice. May the Churches then not hesitate to proclaim to the State, with that deference which they owe to "the magistrate," its weaknesses or its errors. They will accomplish thus their own vocation and will assist the State to understand its own more clearly.

Let those guilty of crimes against the Fatherland receive from public authority the punishment which they deserve; the Churches must, in the name of their doctrine, approve this without reserve. But before being properly judged and condemned they may be deprived of the right of self-defence. The Churches then have a strict duty of making their protest heard. All the more must they lift up their voices when they think that, under various denunciations, innocent people are being arrested and compelled to wait for long weeks before their cases are examined.

Respect for the individual not only demands that every person presumed to be guilty should be respected both in his person and in his right of self-defence, but also that anyone condemned to death should be respected after his execution. That, in a French town on Armistice Day, a man, whatever may have been his crime, should be hanged on a tree, left there all day, against the wishes of the representatives of the central power, before the eyes of children, exposed to the unhealthy curiosity of the crowd, to the attentions of foreign journalists—this is a terrible infliction on a city and the whole nation. The Churches are merely faithful to their vocation in recalling to the State that the State will be neglecting its own vocation if it does not prevent, by every possible means, the repetition of such a profanation.

Some of us in France have publicly denounced, during four years, the abominable treatment meted out to tens of thousands of Frenchmen. Unceasingly we have lifted up our voices against the odious measures inflicted on our compatriots. Our Churches have considered it their most elementary duty to make their condemnation known. No one must be surprised if, in these revolutionary times (so great in some ways) which

explain many excesses and abuses, they do not accept the justification which is given to these abuses under the name of revolutionary legality. This means, often, nothing more than law founded on brute force. Should I lack that discretion which I must impose upon myself, having authority to speak only for one Christian confession, if I express the ardent wish that the various Churches in our country may find themselves in agreement to recall when necessary the demands of all true justice? Further, Christians and Churches must remember the motto from Ecclesiastes, "There is a time to be silent and a time to speak."

STANMORE DRIVER HOLDS SERVICE IN DUTCH CHURCH

A military observer writes: "A Stanmore R.A.S.C. driver with the 15th Scottish Division conducted a service in a Protestant Church in Holland recently.

"He is Driver B. Bartram, of 470, Honey-pot Lane, Stanmore, a wood machinist in civilian life, who was formerly a keen worker for Stanmore Chapel, which is affiliated to the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches. He has frequently held informal services in the field which have proved very popular with the troops, but this was the first occasion that he had had the use of a church.

"After obtaining permission from the O.C.," he said, "I approached the Dominie of the local Protestant Church, and he readily agreed to grant me the use of his church after the normal Sunday morning service. I gladly agreed to his inviting members of his congregation to remain on for my service and quite a number did.

"We chose hymns which were contained both in the Scottish services hymn book and the Dutch hymn book, and the local people sang in Dutch and my congregation in English. It was rather appropriate that the hymns included 'The Church is One Foundation' and at the Dominie's special request we concluded with 'Abide With Me,' although it was a morning service.

"At the end of the service the Church organist played 'God Save The King' and the Dutch National Anthem."

A BREAK FOR CHRISTMAS

Spiritual Issues will not be published next week (December 28th). It will appear again as usual on January 4th, 1945.